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SUBJECT: NORTHERN UGANDA NOTES (FEBRUARY 1-28, 2009)

REF: A. KAMPALA 94 B. KAMPALA 118

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¶1. Summary: The following Northern Uganda Notes provide information on the situation on the ground and USG activities aimed at meeting Mission objectives in northern Uganda. These objectives include promoting regional stability through peace and security, good governance, access to social services, economic growth, and humanitarian assistance. Post appreciates feedback from consumers on the utility of this product and any gaps in information that need to be filled. End Summary.

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PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PROCESSES
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¶2. Joint military operations against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continued. Ugandan President Museveni and Congolese President Kabila met on March 4 on the Uganda-DRC border in Kasese to discuss the extension of "Operation Lightening Thunder" (OLT). In February, Uganda and DRC deployed additional forces into the area of operations to cordon off the LRA and provide additional protection for civilian populations. MONUC (UN Mission in Congo) provided logistics and maintenance for Congolese troops. Local populations have been expressing support for the continuation of the operation, according to Kampala-based diplomats that traveled to Dungu and Bunia from February 26-27. There have been no reports of human rights violations by Ugandan or Congolese troops in OLT, according to various non-governmental organizations and journalists.

¶3. On February 27, LRA negotiator David Matsanga urged the Ugandan government to halt the military operation against the LRA. Matsanga called for "an urgent and temporary ceasefire" to evaluate the failures and successes of the military operation in the region. He proposed a stakeholders' conference. Matsanga claimed that LRA leader Joseph Kony was committed to peace and alleged the LRA had captured 76 Ugandan, Congolese, and Sudanese prisoners of war. (Note: There is no evidence to support this claim. End Note.) The Government of Uganda (GOU) rejected Matsanga's proposal and reiterated its position that Kony must assemble at Riwkangba and sign the Final Peace Agreement (FPA).

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SECURITY UPDATE
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¶4. In February, Human Rights Watch issued a report entitled "The Christmas Massacres: LRA Attacks on Civilians in Northern Congo." The report, based on eyewitness accounts in Doruma, Duru, and Faradje, detailed the LRA's deadly rampage that HRW claims left some

865 dead and 160 abducted from late December 2008 to early January 2009. (Note: UNOCHA reports a lower number. See below. End Note.) According to HRW, the LRA also conducted attacks in September 2008 to punish local communities who helped defectors to escape. HRW reported that UPDF planners had intended on protecting civilians but were unable to do so when troops meant to provide protection arrived late due to bad weather and other complications hampered air transport. According to HRW, MONUC was instructed to give the situation in North Kivu top priority, which hampered its response to the area where LRA attacks were occurring. HRW urged enhanced protection for civilians, operational coordination between

the allied forces and MONUC, increased logistical support from MONUC for the operation, and additional MONUC forces in the area.

15. We caution readers on the variability of the many estimates of casualties, abductions, and displaced persons. UNOCHA put the numbers killed by the LRA at 620 between December 24, 2008, and January 13, 2009. This is lower than the HRW estimate. Both HRW and UNOCHA agree that the LRA killed and abducted hundreds of people throughout 2008. UNOCHA says that between December 2007 and January 2009, 900 civilians were killed and 711 were abducted in DRC and Central African Republic. This includes two LRA killing and kidnapping sprees in February-March and from September to November 2008. In southern Sudan, UNOCHA reports 127 LRA-related deaths and 66 abductions throughout 2008 and 2009. Some 130,000 Congolese are displaced, including 30,000 that were displaced in Dungu during the September-November 2008 LRA killing spree, according to UNOCHA. But humanitarian organizations report that it is difficult to get accurate figures because many Congolese are moving into larger towns with relatives for added protection. As a result, these individuals are not necessarily working their fields for food.

16. To date, UNICEF reports 127 Congolese, Ugandan, and Sudanese

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children have been rescued thanks to OLT. UNICEF's protection officer reports that many Congolese children who escape are returning directly to their villages of origin, which has made it difficult to get accurate numbers. The Ugandan military reports that the total number of people rescued since OLT began is 346 adults and children.

17. The LRA continued to suffer losses of fighters and equipment as the UPDF stepped up the pace of its operations. On January 29, the UPDF freed 119 Congolese abductees, including children, which was the largest rescue of the operation. On January 30, Major Okello Opolo, an escort to LRA Deputy Okot Odhiambo, died of injuries suffered in a firefight with the UPDF in Doruma. The joint forces rescued three Congolese individuals during the skirmish. On February 16, allied forces captured nine LRA members, mostly female fighters, in Dungu, and repatriated them to Uganda and southern Sudan. On February 22, the UPDF killed three LRA rebels and captured another in a battle that took place northwest of Duru.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY

18. On February 4, the Speaker of Parliament, Edward Ssekandi, ordered fresh consultations with all stakeholders on the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) after northern parliamentarians rejected Minister for Northern Uganda David Wakikona's PRDP progress report.

19. Amuru District Chairman, Patrick Okello Oryem said 52% of IDPs in the LRA affected north had left the main camps to resettle in their homes. Kitgum's District Chairman, Komakech John Ogwok, reports that 70% of the people in his district have returned to their homes. This was the result of the improvement of the security situation in the region and the increasing presence of government institutions in the villages, including police and local council officials.

10. USG Activities: The Livelihoods and Enterprises for Agricultural Development (LEAD) program is a key initiative

targeting economic development throughout Uganda, including a dedicated presence and activities in northern Uganda. LEAD is active in a number of PRDP districts and is beginning activities in key LRA-conflict affected districts including Gulu, Amuru, Kitgum, and Pader. LEAD is unique among current donor projects in the agricultural sector in the north because whereas many donor interventions focus on food security and providing seeds and implements to returnees to restart subsistence agriculture in their villages. LEAD focuses on enhancing farm-to-market opportunities and rebuilding commercial agriculture in the north.

¶11. USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI) completed the handover of a block of administrative offices for Purongo Sub-County, Amuru District to the Local Council Chairman. The Amuru County District Chairman attended along with other leaders from the district and county levels. The event created a great deal of excitement in the new district and featured local dancers and musicians.

¶12. USAID/OTI completed the rehabilitation of eleven soccer pitches at primary schools in each of the sub-counties in Gulu District. The U.S. Government donated nets, uniforms, and soccer balls to the counties. The pitches will contribute to the normalization of life for returnees, and provide opportunities for communities to come together for the first time since the war began. It also provides an outlet for young people, many still suffering from the trauma of the conflict.

¶13. USAID/OTI approved several grants in February, including one providing support for the Acholi Cultural Organization, Ker Kwaro, to carry out cleansing ceremonies for return populations across Kitgum district. The USG also supported a Ugandan Football Association-sponsored soccer competition for the north in Gulu, and an activity assisting the upgrading of Opit internally-displaced persons (IDP) camp in Gulu District to town status.

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FROM THE MEDIA AND THE WEB
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¶14. Media reports in February 2009 primarily called for the GOU and the international community to restore the social fabric and provide support for people in the North, who have returned to their homes after many years in IDP camps. On February 9, Gulu District

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Chairman Norbert Mao's weekly column in the government-owned New Vision criticized the slow progress on implementation of the PRDP in an article entitled, "Has the Government moved a vote of no confidence in itself?" Mao comments that "the ordinary people, who, after years in the IDP camps have decided to go back to their homes, may not know what the PRDP is, but the one thing they know is that the government has pledged to restore social harmony and to support them to rebuild their lives. This explains the concern following the announcement by the government that the implementation of the PRDP has been suspended" (ref B). Mao likened the announcement from the Minister's office that the PRDP process needed "to be redone" to a government voting "no confidence" in itself.

¶15. In the article, Mao cited the September 26, 2008, letter from seven U.S. Senators to President Museveni urging the implementation of northern recovery plans. He also cited the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, who in her maiden speech to the UN Security Council on January 29, stated that the U.S. is determined to ensure "that peace building and post-conflict assistance consolidates peace durably once conflict ends."

¶16. Invisible Children, a San Diego-based non-governmental organization, is planning a worldwide campaign entitled "Kony Must Be Stopped. Our Children Must Be Rescued." Events will kick off in Uganda in March and culminate in rallies in several cities throughout the world on April 24. Any funds raised will be used to continue rebuilding northern Ugandan educational facilities and help residents overcome the trauma of the conflict.

BROWNING